



What's Up With Whatsapp Channels?

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Until now in order to be on a WhatsApp group you had to be invited or sent a link to the group. Your phone number was also visible to anyone in the group.

WhatsApp has now introduced a new feature called “Channels” to allow users to search for a Channel on any topic available, and join that Channel without being invited. Channels can share information, images, and video, completely unmoderated and uncensored.

What was once an app that had some limitations to which group you could follow, WhatsApp has become a place to search for any content, even objectionable, indecent content, and sign up for updates anonymously – just like much of the internet. This is like your innocent gold fish transforming into a Shark overnight!

If you use WhatsApp or are considering installing it, it's important to be aware of this huge change to the platform and take responsible steps to address it. Ever since Channels were released in the US, TAG has been working closely with the filter companies to find a solution. At the moment there are some fairly successful fixes for Android devices, and some partially successful blocks for iPhones.



From the Mishor Email | mishor.org | info@mishor.org

The horrifying news coming from Eretz Yisrael R"l presents a new challenge to parents and their children. Although violent and distressing articles, photos, and clips are easily found all over the Internet, for many of us, this is the first time we ourselves are actually being confronted by such media. Since these savage acts of brutality have been committed against Acheinu Bnei Yisrael, they are gaining access into our lives much more easily than other world events may have in the past.

Although many people feel that seeing these pictures and videos, or even just reading about the atrocities committed, will help them feel the pain of the victims so much more and enable them to be mishtateif in their tzaar, there are a number of important points that need to be taken into consideration and shared with our children:

1. Bnei Yisrael have an inborn trait of rachmanus. However, repeated exposure to cruel and barbaric acts can wear down our sense of compassion and dull our senses. Paradoxically, it can cause us to normalize such behavior and desensitize us to the pain and suffering of others.
2. Additionally, exposure to these types of acts can sometimes cause children to act out in violent and aggressive ways.
3. Exposure to these types of explicit media can be very traumatic, especially to a young child or teenager who isn't used to seeing and reading about such acts, but also to adults. This can cause emotional distress and may also have long-term psychological effects.
4. The vividness of the media also causes them to feel as if the world is much more unsafe than it really is, causing an unnecessary level of fear and anxiety.

The following are a number of points as to where these types of media are being accessed:

1. Although generally News sites and Social Media platforms are considered more unsafe than regular texting and WhatsApp, in the context of the current conflict, media that is shared via WhatsApp and MMS may in fact be worse. This is because News sites and Social Media usually have some type of policy regarding what they allow on their platforms in regard to violence, or at least post a warning before such media is shown, cautioning that viewer discretion is advised. For media that is shared by text and WhatsApp, however, no such precautions are in place.

2. Although, as noted, many News Sites and Social Media platforms do try to curb what can be shown, to some extent, there is still a huge amount of disturbing, and often extremely explicit content that is allowed on all News Sites, as well as on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter etc.

3. Even when the gory part of the picture is blurred out, it can still be a catalyst for most of the issues noted above.

4. Regarding Frum News Sites, although they are definitely much better than the secular ones, many still show media that is not appropriate for children (or many adults). Many of these sites show disturbing footage and images, as well as upsetting articles. Additionally, many of them have blogs in which everyone has a platform to put forth their ideas and ideals.

5. Most of these platforms don't have to answer to any Rabbinic oversight or paid subscribers. What gets posted is totally at the discretion of the owners. And since the more traffic their site attracts, the more money they make, they therefore tend to post the most sensational and graphic content possible, as that is guaranteed to attract more people.

6. Many children feel left out when they see all the adults around them watching and discussing the latest news. Although we may be tempted to give them a glimpse of some clips or pictures, be extremely careful about what you choose to show them, as something that adults may not find so disturbing (especially if they have seen so much that they are desensitized) may be very harmful to a child or teenager.

May we hear only besuros tovot b'karov!

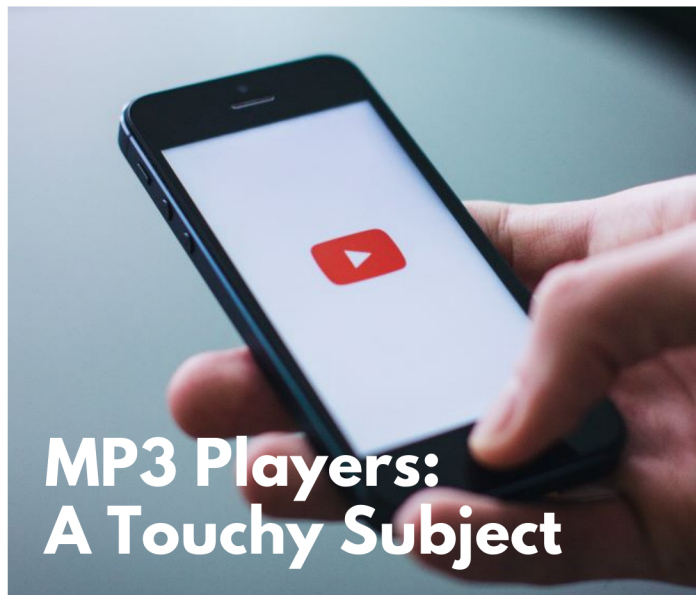
Many kosher devices on the market today, such as phones and MP3 players, do not have any official kosher certification agency ensuring the safety of the device. This is unlike the kosher food industry which has a number of respected certifying agencies overseen by known Rabbinic authorities. The kosher device industry is relatively young and does not have this level of formal oversight.

In the current state of affairs, a merchant selling or manufacturing a device can issue a statement of its Kashrus, and even design a certification emblem with Hebrew lettering, while in truth the only individual overseeing its safety standards is the merchant itself.

TAG technicians have found that some of the devices advertised as Kosher contain serious flaws in their protection and can open an unfiltered internet browser without much difficulty! TAG

Baltimore, as well as other TAG offices, may sell devices on behalf of an outside merchant, but these devices have been thoroughly researched and approved by TAG's international network of technicians.

Before you purchase a device that is advertised as kosher, make sure the protection is indeed safe and the merchant can be trusted. Your local TAG office is ready to help you in your research so you can make an informed decision.



Touchscreen MP3 players have seen a surge in popularity, particularly among children who have yet to reach the age for owning a phone equipped with an integrated media player. Almost all touch music players are powered by the Android software, the same system used by Android smartphones. However, the majority of these MP3 players lack proper security measures, allowing them to access the internet when connected to a WiFi network.

One such player, known as the Timkoo, has been gaining traction within our communities and has even been offered as a prize incentive for children. The Timkoo provides quick access to Google and the internet with just a few taps. Even an unsuspecting, curious child might mistakenly discover that their player can go online while exploring the MP3 player's settings. Online instructions, and YouTube demonstrations, detailing all the necessary steps to access the unfiltered internet on this device are readily available.

Much like smartphones, even a player marketed as "Kosher" can potentially access the internet and play videos. If your child lacks the technical know-how to figure it out, they might have friends who can. See the TAG Baltimore website, tagbaltimore.org, for an up-to-date list of TAG Approved Kosher MP3 players or players that the TAG office can modify to remove the radio feature.

What is TAG Baltimore?

TAG (Technology Awareness Group) is an organization that provides education, guidance, and filtering solutions for the technology needs of our community. Our objective is to empower people to use technology in a safe and responsible fashion. Mordechai Dixler is the current TAG Baltimore Director, and the president of the board is Moshe Herzog. Together with the incredibly dedicated TAG staff, the office is open and efficiently servicing customers five nights a week, with daytime appointments available.

How does TAG help people?

TAG provides various customizable filter solutions for laptops, smartphones and basic phones. The office is staffed with trained volunteers who use their expertise to provide options for the varied needs of our customers. We constantly review available features to customize the products. In this past year alone, TAG Baltimore has assisted over 1300 people from across the entire community.

Does TAG charge for their services?

TAG does not charge for consultation services, or for filter installations and customized setups. The fees for products that TAG recommends and installs are paid directly to the filter companies.

What solutions does TAG offer?

The products we recommend are thoroughly researched and tested by experts at TAG International. These solutions are tailored for personal preferences and maximum flexibility and also provide superb levels of customer support.

Is TAG Baltimore connected to TAG offices in other cities?

We are fortunate to be a part of and benefit from the larger TAG global network. The TAG offices around the world leverage each other's knowledge, expertise and experience to best support our customers. It is not uncommon for someone in the Toronto office to ask a question, be answered by Chicago, have Manchester and Houston chime in, with Lakewood, France and Cleveland offering ideas as well. From Panama to Melbourne and from Boro Park to Antwerp, TAG offices everywhere are united in assisting the greater community with technology

safety. TAG also has direct access to company representatives from all the products that we recommend and offer ensuring quick responses for any issue.

Does TAG sell kosher phones in the office?

TAG has teamed up with SafeCell and SafeTelecom to bring Baltimore kosher phone options available for on site purchase. We sell basic flip phones, Waze only devices and smartphones with pre-approved apps and no browser.

Where is TAG Baltimore located?

Last year TAG moved into a spacious new office. Through a generous grant from the Star-K, the office was beautifully renovated and furnished. The welcoming spacious waiting area has reading material, light refreshments and fresh coffee



available for all our customers. The office has multiple consultation rooms and a conference room for larger meetings as needed. Come visit us at 201 Milford Mill Rd. Suite 103, Baltimore, MD 21208, right across the street from our old office and the Star-K office.

Are appointments needed?

For a daytime meeting you do need an appoint, and for evening hours appointments are highly recommended as they help us

manage our staff and workflow. In the evenings walk-ins are welcome and we will assist you as quickly as possible. To schedule an appointment please visit our website at tagbaltimore.org or call us at 410-449-1824.

What are TAG's plans for the future?

Our goal is to expand many of our services such as providing more service hours, initiating shul filter drives, staffing school liaison events, and running informational expos. Our office will also host Internet kiosks to provide filtered Internet for families that choose not to have Internet in their home.

How can I contact TAG?

Our website is tagbaltimore.org. We can be reached via email at help@tagbaltimore.org or by phone at 410-449-1824.

We look forward to assisting you!